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Press Release

SNP Euro-MP Wins Concession from EU Commissioner on Funding

"Commissioner warned of injustice done to Highlands and Islands"

SNP MEP Mr Alyn Smith has this morning (Tuesday) secured agreement from EU Commissioner-designate Danuta Hubner to re-examine the funding status of the Highlands and Islands. While not raising false hopes, this is a step forward compared to the unwillingness of the UK government to take up the issue.

Mr Smith was questioning the Commissioner-designate at the European Parliament hearing whereby each proposed Commissioner must satisfy MEPs that they are up to the job. The European Parliament will vote on the appointment of the Commissioners later in the year.

He raised the injustice of the Highlands and Islands losing Objective One status (the most advantageous) because of statistics produced by the UK Office of National Statistics, which were subsequently shown to be inaccurate. This left the Highlands and Islands losing out on funding. Mr Smith raised the issue with the Commissioner-designate, and she has agreed to look into it, while praising the enthusiasm for Europe she found on a recent visit to Scotland.

The SNP MEP said:

"I'll not let Highlands and Islands funding rest, and Mrs Hubner's agreement to look into it is a good start though guarantees nothing so our work is far from over. The Highlands and Islands Objective One status created or safeguarded some 10,000 jobs, and the loss of that funding because of a blunder was inexcusable. I've been told by some that I should give up on it but I will keep on raising it as nobody else is and the London Foreign Office forgot about this years ago.

"Mrs Hubner's polished performance this morning has won my support, and we have agreed to work together on this crucial issue for the Highlands and

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ALYN SMITH MEP

FIGHTING FOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND IN EUROPE

Islands. She has been to Scotland and noticed our more pro-European outlook - she had just come from London after all! I'll be inviting her back, and seeking a meeting with her as soon as she is appointed, as I'm sure she will be. I am also pushing for the European Parliament Regional Policy Committee to come visit Scotland to see for themselves how important funding is for us.

"It just struck me though, as I was talking to this highly able Polish appointee, how daft it is for Scotland to have nobody but SNP MEPs speaking up for them when the Poles, Slovaks, Estonians and all the rest now have voices at the top table. If Scotland were independent I could have been quizzing the Scottish appointee to such an important European post."

ENDS

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